

Agenda Item 15(i)

Enclosure 15

**Health and Care Professions Council
21 September 2016**

Consultation on draft social media guidance

For discussion and approval

From Natasha Wynne, Policy Officer

Council, 21 September 2016

Consultation on draft social media guidance

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

In January 2016 we published revised standards of conduct, performance and ethics (SCPE), which include a sub-standard about appropriate use of social media. During the review of the previous version of the standards, registrants' use of social media was a topic that was frequently raised, including amongst registrants who are active on social media.

We have previously produced a page on our website with advice about how to use social media in a way that meets our standards, but we were told registrants would find it helpful to have specific published guidance from us in this area.

As agreed by the Education and Training Committee in March 2016, the Executive contracted a third party to undertake an online 'crowdsourcing' exercise to inform the development of the guidance. We also took into account the requests for advice we have received and the small number of fitness to practise cases which have involved inappropriate use of social media.

We are proposing to consult on the draft guidance between 3 October 2016 and 13 January 2017. A consultation document, the draft guidance for consultation and the final report of the crowdsourcing exercise are attached.

Decision

The Council is invited to discuss and agree the text of the consultation document and the proposed guidance, subject to minor editing amendments.

Background information

- Education and Training Committee, 3 March 2016. A proposal for Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) guidance on the appropriate use of social media and networking websites:
<http://www.hcpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10004F36Enc06-HCPCguidanceontheappropriateuseofsocialmediaandnetworkingwebsites.pdf>
- The revised SCPE were published on 26 January 2016: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardsofconductperformanceandethics/>

- Advice for registrants on meeting our standards - Use of social networking sites: <http://www.hpc-uk.org/registrants/standards/socialnetworking/>

Resource implications

The resource implications include those associated with the public consultation process, analysis of responses, and publication and launch of the guidance. These have been taken into account in departmental work plans for 2016/17.

Financial implications

The financial implications, including reprinting the guidance document, have been accounted for in budget planning for 2016/17.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Guidance on social media (draft for consultation)

Appendix 2: Social media guidance online workshop final report

Date of paper

8 September 2016

Consultation on guidance on social media for registrants

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 We are the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). This consultation seeks the views of our stakeholders on draft guidance for registrants about social media.
- 1.2 In this document, you can find out information about the guidance and how to respond to this consultation. The draft guidance for consultation is published alongside this document on our website.
- 1.3 The consultation runs from **3 October 2016 to 13 January 2017**.

2. About the HCPC

- 2.1 We are a regulator and were set up to protect the public. To do this, we keep a register of professionals who meet our standards for their professional skills and behaviour. Individuals on our register are called 'registrants'.
- 2.2 We currently regulate 16 professions.
 - Arts therapists
 - Biomedical scientists
 - Chiropodists / podiatrists
 - Clinical scientists
 - Dietitians
 - Hearing aid dispensers
 - Occupational therapists
 - Operating department practitioners
 - Orthoptists
 - Paramedics
 - Physiotherapists
 - Practitioner psychologists
 - Prosthetists / orthotists
 - Radiographers
 - Social workers in England

– Speech and language therapists

3. New guidance on social media

3.1 In January 2016 we published revised standards of conduct, performance and ethics ('the Standards').¹ The Standards now include a sub-standard about registrants' use of social media:

2.7 You must use all forms of communication appropriately and responsibly, including social media and networking websites.

Why are we publishing guidance?

3.2 When we reviewed the previous version of the Standards, registrants' use of social media was a topic that came up frequently, including amongst registrants who were active on social media and amongst educators. We were told that registrants were increasingly using social media as a personal and professional communication tool and that some were anxious about using social media for fear of not meeting our standards. It was argued by some stakeholders that an explicit reference to social media in the Standards would be helpful to highlight that registrants' obligations to communicate appropriately and effectively also extended to use of this medium.

3.3 Several years ago now we published some advice on our website about using social media in a way which meets our standards.² However, during the review, we were told that registrants would value specific published guidance from us in this area. This was also a recommendation from the Professional Liaison Group (PLG) we established as part of the review process.

3.3 In deciding to publish guidance, we took into account the queries we have received in recent years seeking advice about this area. We also took into account the small number of fitness to practise cases we have considered which have concerned inappropriate use of social media.

What is the relationship of the guidance to other sources of guidance?

3.4 We know that some (but not all) of the professional bodies that represent the health and care professionals on our Register already produce their own guidance on the use of social media. Although there will be some overlap, this guidance is often much broader than the guidance we are consulting on. Professional bodies' guidance often includes helpful advice about topics such as making the most of social media to promote the profession; the benefits of

¹ <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardsofconductperformanceandethics/>

² <http://www.hpc-uk.org/registrants/standards/socialnetworking/>

different social media websites; how to measure the effectiveness of social media activity; and explaining social media specific terminology.

- 3.5 As a regulator, our draft guidance necessarily focuses on the ethical aspects of social media use, providing advice about meeting our standards of conduct, performance and ethics. The feedback we have received to date indicates that registrants would value clear, published guidance from us which provides reassurance so that they can use social media with the confidence that they are meeting expected standards.
- 3.6 The proposed guidance is therefore complementary to the guidance produced by the professional bodies. In the draft guidance for consultation we have acknowledged the role of professional bodies as sources of further advice.

How have we developed the guidance?

- 3.7 In May 2016 we ran an online workshop to engage stakeholders in identifying the areas that should be addressed in the guidance. It is important whenever we publish guidance that we do this in partnership with the registrants and other stakeholders who will use it, or who have an interest in its content.
- 3.8 Participants in the workshop were asked to comment on three overlapping themes:
- **Top tips – dos and don'ts.** What are the things a HCPC registrant should or should not do when using social media?
 - **The challenge of using social media.** What are the challenges that a HCPC registrant could face when using social media?
 - **The value of using social media.** How can social media be useful for your practice or help you as a service user? Can you share examples?
- 3.9 Participants were able to add ideas and to comment and vote (like / dislike) on the ideas of others.
- 3.10 We informed a range of stakeholders about the campaign. This included issuing a press release; sending a stakeholder email; utilising our existing social media channels; and directly emailing a sample comprising 5,000 registrants. We particularly wanted to target registrants who were already active on social media.
- 3.11 313 people participated in the workshop. The majority were registrants but some identified themselves as educators and a small number as service users and carers. There were 2,081 contributions (ideas, comments and

votes). You can download a copy of the report of the workshop from our website.³

4. The draft guidance for consultation

- 4.1 We have used the outcomes of the online survey to help us develop the draft guidance. We also looked at the guidance published by other organisations including other regulators of health and care professionals and professional bodies.
- 4.2 In the guidance, we wanted to strike the correct balance and tone between acknowledging the value of social media as a dynamic and effective communication tool and highlighting the importance of meeting our standards. We want to make clear that our expectations of registrants' behaviour extends to their use of social media, whilst recognising that the vast majority of registrants who use this medium already do so responsibly and without any difficulties at all.
- 4.3 In keeping with the small number of other guidance documents we have produced, we wanted this guidance to be principles-based. We therefore intend the guidance to set out how we expect registrant to apply our standards when using social media in different contexts. We also want the guidance to be clear, concise and accessible.
- 4.4 We would value the views of stakeholders about how successful we have been in achieving these goals.
- 4.5 Once the consultation has concluded, we will use the comments we receive to improve the draft guidance further. We will then work with the Plain English Campaign to edit the guidance before we publish the final copy.

³ [to appear here]

5. How to respond to the consultation

5.1 We welcome your comments on the draft guidance. We have listed some questions to help you below. The questions are not designed to be exhaustive and we would welcome your comments on any aspect of the guidance.

Q.1 Is the guidance clear and easy to understand? How could we improve it?

Q.2 Could any parts of the guidance be reworded or removed?

Q.3 Do you have any other comments on the draft guidance?

5.2 You can respond to this consultation in the following ways.

- By completing our easy-to-use online survey: [\[add link here\]](#)
- By emailing us at: consultation@hcpc-uk.org.
- By writing to us at the following address.

Consultation on guidance on social media
Policy and Standards Department
Health and Care Professions Council
Park House
184 Kennington Park Road
London
SE11 4BU
Fax: +44(0)20 7820 9684

5.3 Please note that we do not normally accept responses by telephone or in person. We normally ask that consultation responses are made in writing. However, if you are unable to respond in writing, please contact us on +44(0)20 7840 9815 to discuss any reasonable adjustments that would help you to respond.

5.4 Please complete the online survey or send us your response by 13 January 2017.

5.5 **Please contact us to request a copy of this document in Welsh or in an alternative format.**

5.6 Once the consultation period is completed, we will analyse the responses we receive. We will then publish a document which summarises the comments we received and explains the decisions we have taken as a result. This will be published on our website.

Guidance on social media

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About this document

We have written this document to provide guidance to registrants who use social media. It explains how to use social media in a way which meets our standards.

This document cannot address every issue that might come up. We have instead focused on the issues registrants and other stakeholders told us they came across most frequently.

This guidance is focused on our standards. Some professional bodies publish useful social media guidelines to support their members to get the most from this technology. If you are employed, your employer may also have relevant policies or guidance that apply to you.

How this document is structured

This document is divided into four sections:

- Section 1 provides information about the HCPC;
- Section 2 contains some top tips for using social media;
- Section 3 provides guidance on how our standards relate to use of social media, and some relevant issues you may come across;
- Section 4 contains information about how to find out more.

Language

Throughout this document:

- 'we' and 'us' refers to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC);
- 'registrant' refers to a professional on our Register;
- 'you' or 'your' refers to a registrant.

Section 1: About us

We are a regulator and were set up to protect the public. To do this, we keep a register of professionals who meet our standards for their professional skills and behaviour. Individuals on our register are called 'registrants'.

We currently regulate 16 professions:

- Arts therapists
- Biomedical scientists
- Chiropodists / podiatrists
- Clinical scientists
- Dietitians
- Hearing aid dispensers
- Occupational therapists
- Operating department practitioners
- Orthoptists
- Paramedics
- Physiotherapists
- Practitioner psychologists
- Prosthetists / orthotists
- Radiographers
- Social workers in England
- Speech and language therapists

We may regulate other professions in the future. For an up-to-date list, please see our website at www.hcpc-uk.org

About the standards

We set standards of conduct, performance and ethics, which set out the high level principles of how we expect registrants to behave. We use the standards when a concern has been raised about a registrant, to help us decide whether we need to take action to protect the public.

As a registrant, you must make sure you are familiar with the standards and that you continue to meet them at all times.

Section 2: Top tips

The following are some top tips for using social media in a way which meets our standards. You can find information about how to put these into practice in the next section of this document.

- **Apply the same standards of behaviour as you would elsewhere.** If you wouldn't put something in a letter or email or say it out loud, don't say it on social media.
- **Think before you post.** Try to be polite and steer clear of inappropriate or offensive language.
- **Think about who can see what you share** and consider managing your privacy settings accordingly.
- **Maintain appropriate professional boundaries** if you communicate with service users or carers.
- **Do not post confidential or identifiable information.**
- **Do not post inappropriate or offensive material.**
- If you are employed, **be aware of your employer's social media policy.**
- When in doubt, **seek advice** from a friend or colleague. You can also contact us if you are unsure about the Standards.
- **Keep on posting!** Social media is a great communication tool. There's no reason why registrants shouldn't keep on using it with confidence.

Section 3: Using social media

Benefits of social media

Social media is a dynamic and effective communication tool. Registrants have told us that social media can help them to:

- develop and share their skills and knowledge;
- engage with service users and carers and provide them with information;
- network with other professionals nationally and internationally; and
- raise the profile of their profession.

We know that registrants can sometimes be anxious about using social media because they want to make sure that they always meet our standards. The vast majority of registrants who use social media already do so responsibly, in line with our standards, and without any difficulties at all. This guidance explains what our standards mean when using social media.

We have structured the guidance below under the areas of our standards which apply to the appropriate use of social media.

Communicate appropriately

The standards of conduct, performance and ethics say:

‘You must use all forms of communication appropriately and responsibly, including social media and networking websites’ (2.7)

Social media sites can provide a valuable platform for communicating with other professionals and to promote a better understanding of your profession to a wider audience. However, social media activity which is unprofessional may put your registration at risk.

You should apply the same standards as you would elsewhere when using social media. If you would not write it in a letter or an email or say it out loud, do not post it on social media. Try to be polite and respectful, and avoid using language that others might reasonably consider to be inappropriate or offensive.

Be honest and trustworthy

Our standards of conduct, performance and ethics say...

‘You must make sure that your conduct justifies the public’s trust and confidence in you and your profession’ (9.1)

This means you need to think about who can see what you share. Make sure you understand the privacy settings of each social media channel that you use. Even on a completely personal account, your employer, colleagues or service users may be able to see your posts or personal information. It is best to assume that anything you post online will be visible to everyone.

Our standards of conduct, performance and ethics state that...

'You must make sure that any promotional activities you are involved in are accurate and are not likely to mislead' (9.3)

If you use social media to advertise or share information related to your professional practice, you must make sure it is fair and true to the best of your knowledge.

Respect confidentiality

Our standards of conduct, performance and ethics say...

'You must treat information about service users as confidential' (5.1)

When you post information about another person on social media, think about whether it is appropriate to share that information. If the information is confidential and/or could allow a service user to be identified, you should not put it on a site. This could include information about their personal life, health or circumstances, or images relating to their care.

Even if you have the highest level of privacy settings, something you share online can quickly be copied and redistributed to a much wider audience. This means a post can stay in the public domain after you delete it. Try to stay up to date with any changes to the privacy settings of the social media platforms you use. If you are unsure whether to post, seek advice from a friend or colleague first.

Maintain appropriate boundaries

Our standards of conduct, performance and ethics state:

'You must keep your relationships with service users and carers professional.'
(1.7)

Some professionals find social media a valuable way of communicating with service users and the public. However, social media can blur the boundaries between the personal and the professional. It is just as important to maintain appropriate boundaries when using social media as it would be if you were communicating through any other medium.

You should make sure that you always communicate with service users in a professional manner. You might decide to set up a separate professional account where you direct any contact with service users. If you are employed and plan to use this account to have direct contact with service users, you may need to agree whether this is appropriate with your employer.

If you choose to have a single account for social and work purposes, think carefully about whether you would be happy for both audiences to see the material you post. Whether you have a single account or separate accounts, always think carefully about what you post and who can see it.

If you have separate accounts or profiles, keep in mind that service users may still be able to find and contact you via your personal account. If this happens, we recommend that you politely decline a friend request or send them a separate message if appropriate.

DRAFT FOR COUNCIL

Section 4: More information

Contact us

You can contact us if you have any questions about this guidance or our standards. Please be aware, however, that we cannot offer legal advice. Our contact details are below:

The Health and Care Professions Council
Park House
184 Kennington Park Road
London
SE11 4BU.

Tel: +44 (0)300 500 6184

You can download copies of our standards documents and other publications from our website at www.hcpc-uk.org.

Other sources of guidance

We recognise the valuable role professional bodies play in representing and promoting the interests of their members. This often includes guidance and advice about good practice which can help you meet the standards that we set.

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Glossary

Carer

Anyone who looks after, or provides support to, a family member, partner or friend.

Professional bodies

Organisations which promote or represent members of a profession. They may also carry out work such as providing guidance and advice, producing curriculum frameworks, overseeing post-registration education and training, and running continuing professional development programmes.

Register

A published list of health and care professionals who meet our standards. The Register is available on our website at www.hcpc-uk.org.

Registrant

A health and care professional who appears on our Register and meets our standards.

Service user

Anyone who uses or is affected by the services of registrants, for example, patients or clients.

Social media

Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content, and to interact with other users. This includes websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as online forums and blogs.

Standards of conduct, performance and ethics

Standards of behaviour that we expect from health and care professionals who are registered with us.